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2 More GOP Senators Want Casey to Quit; Reagan Praises Him

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William J. Casey, the embattled director of the Central Intelligence Agency, vowed to fight for his job yesterday, but support for him was fading fast on Capitol Hill and within the administration itself.

Despite the mounting opposition, however, Casey had a powerful patron on his side. Late in the afternoon President Reagan told reporters that "we still have confidence" in the CIA director, who is the target of a Senate Intelligence Committee investigation into past financial practices.

Nonetheless, the administration has carefully laid the groundwork for a change in its position if the Senate committee comes up with a recommendation that Casey should go. White House spokesman David R. Gergen issued a statement yesterday pledging full cooperation with the Senate committee, but added: "Everyone recognizes that the conclusion of that committee may affect the climate on the Hill and the climate elsewhere."

Reagan declined to say whether the administration would necessarily abide by the committee's recommendations but said he would talk to the senators about whatever they recommend.

Other White House officials said they were concerned that Republican opposition to Casey could damage his effectiveness and make it difficult for him to continue as head of the CIA.

On Capitol Hill, two more leading Republican senators, Ted Stevens of Alaska and William V. Roth of Delaware, declared that Casey should resign. This development followed Sen. Barry Goldwater's announcement at a Thursday night news conference.

chief. Hugel was forced to resign because of a financial scandal.

Goldwater (R-Ariz.) is chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee. His announcement came as a shock to administration officials, who thought Goldwater was going to refute a television report that he had privately asked Casey to quit.

Yesterday, Senate Majority Whip Stevens and Roth, a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, both told reporters in outspoken terms that Casey should resign.

"He should go — now," Roth said emphatically.

A member of the Senate defense appropriations subcommittee, Stevens said that panel, too, was "worried about the future of the agency if the director becomes the focal point of controversy at this time."

"It's my judgment that Barry doesn't make these recommendations lightly," Stevens added. "He has the interests of the agency at heart."

Roth said at a press conference that he felt strongly that Casey's effectiveness had been compromised already.

"The director of the CIA must be above suspicion, and to borrow a phrase from President Eisenhower, 'cleaner than a hound's tooth,'" Roth said. He said the Intelligence Committee's investigation into allegations involving Casey's pre-CIA business dealings was continuing, but he felt that Casey's credibility with the committee had been so damaged already "that I believe it is impossible for Mr. Casey to effectively discharge his duties."

The opposition of Stevens, who said that Casey should leave "for the good of the agency," shook White House officials. Stevens has a reputation for being a tough

party reservation, and his opposition was viewed as a signal that Casey is in deep trouble.

The growing criticism of Casey in Congress was laced with expressions of concern for the agency and repeated reminders of the delicate state of international affairs. What seemed to be bothering the senators was not any hard evidence of wrongdoing on Casey's part but lack of confidence in his judgment as head of the entire U.S. intelligence community.

"Everybody makes fun of him up here," said one well-attuned congressional source. "There's a feeling that he's got all these harebrained schemes that he's too willing to go along with. From time to time, CIA people will say, 'Wait till you hear what we had to talk him out of this time.'"

Opinion is more divided within the administration, but the same concerns have been raised there, too. One source was critical of Casey's "lack of contributions" at National Security Council meetings. Another thought that Casey was "getting a bum rap" but was puzzled at the depth of Senate opposition, which is taken seriously at the White House.

There is no desire at the White House for conflict with a GOP-controlled Senate that has supported Reagan's major legislative proposals.

"Before that happens, I'm sure the president will sit down with the senators and talk it over," an administration official said.

Reagan did not talk to either Casey or the Senate critics yesterday. That was left to White House chief of staff James A. Baker III, who is overseeing the administration strategy on Casey. White House counsel Fred Fielding is reading documents as they are submitted to the Senate committee, and Gergen said that, so far, "nothing has come to

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